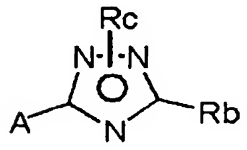
IN THE CLAIMS

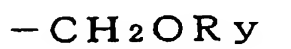
Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A 1,2,4-triazole compound represented by formula (a):



(a)

wherein A represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group ~~optionally~~ which is unsubstituted or substituted at a position other than 2-position or an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted 2-cyanopyridin-4-yl group, Rb represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted pyridyl or phenyl group, and Rc is a group represented by formula (6)



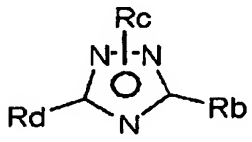
$$-CH_2ORy \qquad (6)$$

wherein Ry represents a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl group, diphenylmethyl or a p-alkoxybenzyl group ~~represents a group which makes the compound of formula (a) soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid and which is~~ and bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, or a salt or hydrate thereof.

Claim 2 (Cancelled).

3. (Currently Amended) The 1,2,4-triazole compound, or the salt or hydrate thereof according to claim 1 [[or 2]], wherein the salt is p-toluenesulfonate, methanesulfonate, hydrochloride or sulfate.

4. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A process for producing a compound represented by formula (3):

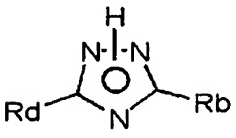


(3)

wherein Rd represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted at a position other than 2-position, Rb represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted pyridyl or phenyl group, and Rc is a group represented by formula (6)

$$-CH_2ORy \qquad (6)$$

wherein Ry represents a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl group, diphenylmethyl or a p-alkoxybenzyl group~~represents a group which makes the compound of formula (3) soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid and which is~~ and bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, and a salt or hydrate thereof, which comprises reacting a compound represented by formula (1):



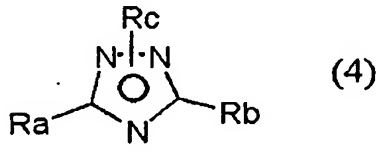
(1)

wherein Rd and Rb are as defined above and the hydrogen atom is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring with a compound represented by formula (2):

$$Rc-X \qquad (2)$$

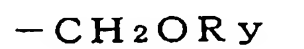
wherein Rc is as defined above ~~represents a group which makes the aimed compound soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid~~ and X represents a halogen atom or sulfonate residue.

5. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A process for producing a compound represented by formula (4):



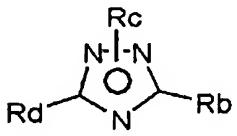
(4)

wherein Ra represents an unsubstituted or ~~optionally~~ substituted 2-cyanopyridin-4-yl group, Rb represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted pyridyl or phenyl group, and ~~Rc represents a group which makes the compound of formula (3) soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid and which is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring~~ Rc is a group represented by formula (6)



$$-CH_2ORy \qquad (6)$$

wherein Ry represents a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl group, diphenylmethyl or a p-alkoxybenzyl group and bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring , and a salt or hydrate thereof, which comprises reacting a compound represented by formula (3):



(3)

wherein Rd represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group ~~optionally~~ which is unsubstituted or substituted at a position other than 2-position, and Rb and Rc are as defined above with a nitrilization agent.

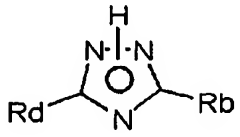
6. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A process for producing a compound represented by formula (4):

(4)

wherein Ra represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted 2-cyanopyridin-4-yl group, Rb represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted pyridyl or phenyl group, and ~~Rc represents a group which makes the compound of formula (3) soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid and which is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring~~ Rc is a group represented by formula (6)

$$-CH_2OR_y \qquad (6)$$

wherein Ry represents a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl group, or diphenylmethyl or a p-alkoxybenzyl group and bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, and a salt or hydrate thereof, which comprises reacting a compound represented by formula (1):

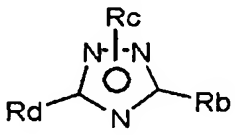


(1)

wherein Rd represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group ~~optionally~~ which is unsubstituted or substituted at a position other than 2-position, Rb is as defined above and the hydrogen atom is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring with a compound represented by formula (2):

$$Rc-X \qquad (2)$$

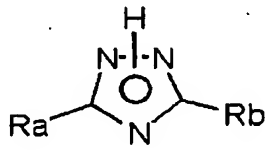
wherein Rc is as defined above ~~represents a group which makes the aimed compound soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid~~, and X represents a halogen atom or sulfonate residue to give a compound represented by formula (3):



(3)

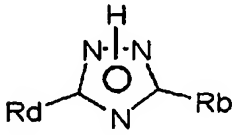
wherein Rb, Rc and Rd are as defined above, and then reacting the resulting compound (3) with a nitrilization agent.

7. (Currently Amended) A process for producing a compound represented by formula (5):



(5)

wherein Ra represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted 2-cyanopyridin-4-yl group, Rb represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted pyridyl or phenyl group, and the hydrogen atom is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, and a salt or hydrate thereof, which comprises reacting a compound represented by formula (1):



(1)

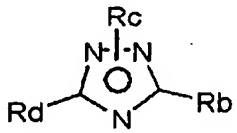
wherein Rd represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group ~~optionally~~ which is unsubstituted or substituted at a position other than 2-position, Rb is as defined above and the hydrogen atom is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring with a compound represented by formula (2):

$$Rc-X \qquad (2)$$

wherein Rc is a group represented by formula (6)

$$-CH_2ORy \qquad (6)$$

wherein Ry represents a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl group, or diphenylmethyl or a p-alkoxybenzyl group ~~Rc represents a group which makes the aimed product soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid~~, and X represents a halogen atom or sulfonate residue to give a compound represented by formula (3):



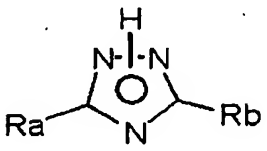
(3)

wherein Rc is as defined above ~~represents a group which makes the compound of formula (3) soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid~~ and which is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, and Rb and Rd are as defined above, and then reacting the resulting compound (3) with a nitrilization agent to give a compound represented by formula (4):

(4)

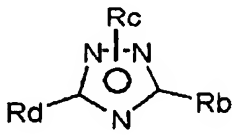
wherein Ra, Rb and Rc are as defined above, and further reacting the resulting compound with an acid.

8. (Withdrawn-Currently Amended) A process for producing a compound represented by formula (5):



(5)

wherein Ra represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted 2-cyanopyridin-4-yl group, Rb represents an ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted pyridyl or phenyl group, and the hydrogen atom is bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, and a salt or hydrate thereof, which comprises reacting a compound represented by formula (3):

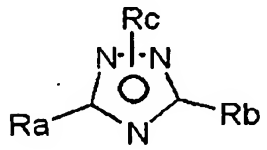


(3)

wherein Rd represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group ~~optionally~~ unsubstituted or substituted at a position other than 2-position, Rc is a group represented by formula (6)

$$-CH_2ORy \qquad (6)$$

wherein Ry represents a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl group, or diphenylmethyl or a p-alkoxybenzyl group ~~Rc represents a group which makes the compound of formula (3) soluble in an organic solvent and which can be removed by an acid and which is~~ and bonded to any of the nitrogen atoms in the triazole ring, and Rb is as defined above with a nitrilization agent to give a compound represented by formula (4):



(4)

wherein Ra, Rb and Rc are as defined above, and then reacting the resulting compound with an acid.

Claim 9 (Cancelled).

10. (Currently Amended) The process according to ~~any one of claims 4-9~~ claim 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8, wherein the salt is p-toluenesulfonate, methanesulfonate, hydrochloride or sulfate.

11. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein A represents a pyridine N-oxide-4-yl group substituted with at least one group selected from the group consisting of a nitro group, a halogen atom, a lower alkyl group, a lower alkoxy group, a lower alkylthio group and a phenyl group.

12. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl or phenyl group substituted with at least one group selected from the group consisting of a cyano group, a nitro group, a halogen atom, a lower alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted lower alkoxy group, a lower alkylthio group, a N-lower alkylpiperadino group, a lower alkylamino group, a phenyl group and a phenylthio group.

13. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl group substituted with at least one group selected from the group consisting of a cyano group, a nitro group, a halogen atom, a lower alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted lower alkoxy group, a lower alkylthio group, a N-lower alkylpiperadino group, a lower alkylamino group, a phenyl group and a phenylthio group.

14. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein Rb represents a phenyl group substituted with at least one group selected from the group consisting of a cyano group, a nitro group, a halogen atom, a lower alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted lower alkoxy group, a lower alkylthio group, a N-lower alkylpiperadino group, a lower alkylamino group, a phenyl group and a phenylthio group.

15. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 12, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl or phenyl group substituted with a halogen atom selected from the group consisting of fluorine, chlorine, bromine and iodine.

16. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 12, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl or phenyl group substituted with a lower alkyl groups which is a straight or branched alkyl groups having 1 to 6 carbon atoms.

17. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 12, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl or phenyl group substituted with a substituted or unsubstituted lower alkoxy group which is a substituted or unsubstituted straight or branched alkoxy groups having 1 to 6 carbon atoms.

18. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 12, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl or phenyl group substituted with a lower alkylthio group which is a straight or branched alkylthio groups having 1 to 6 carbon atoms.

19. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 12, wherein Rb represents a pyridyl or phenyl group substituted with an N-lower alkylpiperadino groups or a lower alkylamino group comprising straight or branched alkyl groups having 1 to 6 carbon atoms.

20. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein Ry represents a straight or branched C_{1-6} alkyl group, phenyl C_{1-6} alkyl group, C_{1-6} alkoxy C_{1-6} alkyl groups or a tri(C_{1-6} alkyl) silyl-C_{1-6} alkyl group.

21. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 20, wherein Ry represents of methyl, ethyl, isopropyl, methoxy, ethoxy, or isopropoxy group.

22. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein Ry represents a p-C_{1-6} alkoxybenzyl group.

23. (New) The 1,2,4-triazole compound according to claim 1, wherein Ry represents benzyloxymethyl, methoxymethyl, methoxyethoxymethyl, trimethylsilylethoxymethyl, diphenylmethyl, or p-methoxybenzyl.